

Story 1346 (1969 Tape 5)

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Şiran kaza, Gümüşhane
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Marital Problems of Mahmut

There was once a wealthy caravan leader who had two sons Ahmet and Mahmut. When this man knew that he would soon die, he divided all of his money and all of his property equally between these two sons. Ahmet, like his father, was a very industrious person, and his hard work soon increased the fortune he had inherited from his father. Mahmut, on the other hand, was a ^{business} lazy, good-for-nothing fellow who spent all of his time in taverns, where he squandered all of his inheritance on wine and women. Soon his wealth had disappeared, and he became so poor that he had to sleep in the streets.

One day the padişah of that land decided that he would recruit from among his people a strong wrestler who could compete against the champion of that time, a wrestler in the court of the padişah of India. The Turkish padişah had town criers announce this in all the streets of the city, but after several days it became clear that no one was going to volunteer for this job. There were many wrestlers in the land, but they were afraid to compete against the famous Indian champion.

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Still determined to have a Turkish competitor, the padişah sent his men into the streets to find a likely candidate. The only person they found who looked strong enough to be a wrestler was Mahmut, and so they took him to the palace. There the padişah said to him, "Son, you are the man who will wrestle against the famous Indian wrestler."

"My padişah," said Mahmut, "I am not that strong, and I have never wrestled against anyone."

But because there seemed to be no one else available the padişah repeated, "Son, you are the man I have chosen for this task."

The wrestling match between Mahmut and the Indian champion was to take place forty days from that time. As day after day passed, Mahmut grew more and more worried about this contest. How could he possibly compete against the famous Indian wrestler? Mahmut had an uncle who was supposed to be a very wise man, and so the young man decided to consult this uncle about his problem. His uncle said, "My nephew, I have reason to believe that the Indian champion is not a man but a woman. Women's breasts are the most sensitive parts of their bodies, and you may be able to defeat that woman by attacking her breasts."

Mahmut was greatly encouraged by this advice from his

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uncle. For the remainder of the forty days he exercised, practiced wrestling holds with other Turkish wrestlers, and got plenty of sleep each night. He wanted to be as well prepared as possible for the contest

At the end of the forty days, both padişahs and all of their officials gathered around the wrestling ring to watch the contest. Upon entering the ring, the Indian wrestler uttered such a mighty bellow that everything in that area shook and rattled. For a moment Mahmut was frightened, but then he remembered the advice which his uncle had given him. When he attacked the Indian wrestler, he always grabbed her by the breasts, and since she was indeed a woman, Mahmut was able to defeat her in this way.

After the wrestling match had ended, the Indian wrestler said, "No one else has ever defeated me, but when I became a wrestler I secretly vowed that if any man did defeat me, I would marry him. I shall, therefore, marry you, Mahmut. They were wedded shortly after that, but because the padişah of India did not approve of their marriage, they decided to live in another country.

But the padişah of India could not stop thinking about this matter. He frequently thought about the girl and wished that she were back in India. One day when he was deep in

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thought about this, he was approached by a very old woman who asked, "Oh, my padişah, what are you thinking about so deeply?"

"It is a matter about which I must think deeply. If I did not do so, who would do it for me? I lost not only my best wrestler, but at the same time I also lost my daughter. That is what I am thinking about."

The old woman said, "My padişah, I can bring your daughter back to you."

"If you can do that," replied the padişah, "I shall give you anything you desire."

the padişah's daughter were living, and she quickly rode to that country on a large jar.² Because the old woman had come from his wife's country, Mahmut did not hesitate to leave the

*Witch who
for Şeyy (küp)*

¹In Turkish folktales the word witch has various connotations. It may be a person associated with cosmic evil. It may be a person with supernatural powers who may or may not also be a ghoul. With or without supernatural powers, it may be an old woman available for hire to undertake nefarious deeds of various kinds. In this latest capacity, she may be simply a shrewd, wily, and unscrupulous accomplice in covert action against someone. It is clear that the witch in this tale does have at least limited supernatural power.

²Turkish witches do not ride on broomsticks but on large earthenware jars. From ancient times, people of the Middle East have stored various liquids (and sometimes dry materials) in huge vases--sometimes as much as 6 to 8 feet in height. These were similar to the amphora of classical times. Such a vehicle is much more practical than a broomstick, for it has ample storage space for loot or for kidnapped victims. The Turkish word for such a vase is küp.

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two of them alone together. In fact, soon after the old woman had arrived, he went on a hunting expedition. While he was away, the witch woman put a spell upon his wife and persuaded her to return to India with her. Accordingly, the two of them selected fine horses from the stable and rode off toward India together ³

When Mahmut returned from his hunting trip, he found his house completely deserted. By questioning some of their neighbors, he learned that his wife and the old woman had ridden away in the direction of India. Mounting his best horse, Mahmut began riding at a gallop day and night in an effort to overtake the two women before they reached India. It was a very great distance to India, and Mahmut expected to be able to catch up with them. One day when he met a caravan coming along his route, he asked its leader if he had seen a young woman and a very old woman pass that way. "Yes, I saw two women pass this way about a month ago."

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Hearing this, Mahmut spurred his horse and began riding again in pursuit of the women. After many days he finally caught up with them, but because his wife was still under the witch's spell, she did not recognize him. As he approached,

³It is quite inconsistent to have the witch travel to Mahmut's house on a küp and then have her return with her victim on horseback.

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his wife called out, "Don't take another step closer to us, or I shall kill you!" Mahmut argued and begged her to be reasonable, but when he moved closer, his wife hurled a large knife at him, wounding him very seriously. But when she saw Mahmut's blood, she was released from the witch's spell. She cried and cried by his body, but had recognized him apparently too late to save him from death. Then, leaving a bag of gold and Mahmut's horse by his side, she left and continued her journey to India, which was now very close. Now we shall let her enter her own country, and we shall return to Mahmut's side

*Enchantment
release
from
(cure for)*

After Mahmut had lain there on the ground suffering for some time, a caravan came along, and its drivers saw him. The caravan leader sent two men to see what was wrong with Mahmut, but Mahmut's horse would not permit them to get close to his body. The leader had to send more men to capture the horse and tie it down before they could reach Mahmut and examine his condition. They then took Mahmut, his horse, and the bag of gold to their leader, who was confused by the scene they had discovered. To himself he said, "If some enemy wounded this man so gravely, why did that person leave the bag of gold there? On the other hand, if he was wounded by a friend who left this gold here, why did that person abandon

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here instead of helping him?" The caravan leader could think of logical answers to these questions, but he was a good man and he had Mahmut, still unconscious, carried along the short distance between that place and his own home

The caravan leader had a daughter who was an educated person and who had the reputation of being a good medical ~~doctor~~. The leader said to this girl, "Daughter, do whatever should be done to save the life of this young man."

This daughter of the caravan leader applied all of her intelligence and all of her medical skill to her effort to cure Mahmut, and after a week he recovered consciousness and began to regain some of his strength.

When Mahmut was almost entirely recovered, he heard a report that there was a large festival of some kind going on in a nearby city just inside the border of India. When Mahmut went there and inquired about this festival, he was told "Zeynep, our padişah's daughter, is very soon to be married to the oldest son of the grand vizier."

In that country, just as in our own country, cirit⁴ was

⁴Cirit is an ancient Turkish game similar to European jousting at tournaments. The difference, however, is this: Tournaments feature contests between two participants; cirit is a "battle royal," a free-for-all struggle in which each participant fights against all other participants. Once a deadly game, cirit in modern times is played not with javelins but with blunted sticks.

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often one of the games played during the festivities preceding a wedding, and the first cirit game was to be played on the very day that Mahmut visited the Indian city. People urged Mahmut to participate in this cirit contest. But he refused, saying, "No, if I should enter the cirit game, I might kill someone." They insisted on his participation in the cirit game, and they finally persuaded him to do so. Riding his horse to the palace, Mahmut saw a large crowd gathered nearby.

Mahmut and the grand vizier's oldest son rode into the cirit arena at the same time. Mahmut threw his javelin at his opponent and killed him with one blow. The padişah's men immediately captured Mahmut and took him into the presence of the padişah. The ruler said to him, "Oh, son, why did you kill the vizier's son?"

"It was not my fault that he was killed. I refused to participate in the cirit game at first because, as I told your men, I might kill someone there. But your men insisted that I play cirit, and this is the result. It is their fault, not mine."

It was then decided to continue the wedding festivities but to marry Zeynep now to the middle son of the grand vizier. New cirit games were held, and in one of them Mahmut killed the middle son of the grand vizier.

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made a third attempt to have Zeynep married, this time to the youngest son of the grand vizier. To protect this third bridegroom, however, they refused to allow him to participate in any of the cirit games.

When Mahmut heard about this, he used a different strategy to recover his former wife. He sent his doctor, who was also a girl, to Zeynep with a ring which Zeynep had once given to him. As soon as Zeynep saw that ring, she knew that Mahmut was somewhere in that area. She asked the doctor, "Where does the owner of this ring live?

is living in my father's home," said the doctor

Zeynep then said, "Tomorrow is to be the nuptial night of my wedding with the youngest son of the grand vizier. Tell Mahmut to come secretly to my room earlier in the day so that he can rescue me from this marriage."

When the nuptial night arrived, the bridegroom was led to the nuptial chamber of the palace. As soon as he entered the room, he ordered Zeynep to give him a glass of water, but when she handed him the glass, he knocked it to the floor, saying, "Get out of here! I shall not sleep with the leftover wife of a dirty Ottoman!"⁵

⁵Before the founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923, the land mass that is now Turkey was the center of the Ottoman Empire for roughly 600 years. Although the term Ottoman was sometimes reserved for the educated elite, any person within the Ottoman Empire could be called Ottoman (Osmanlı).

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If that Ottoman were here, he would punish you for calling him dirty!"

As Zeynep said that, Mahmut came from beneath the bed, where he had been hiding. He drew his sword and killed the youngest son of the grand vizier. Then Mahmut, the doctor, and Zeynep went to the courtyard of the palace, where Mahmut had left three horses saddled and equipped for travel. Thus before anyone else had discovered what had happened, the three fled that city and rode until they reached a range of tall mountains. Mahmut then said, "I made a vow that if we escaped safely, we would live in hiding in these mountains for three years. By that time all attempts to pursue and capture us will have ended."

The three of them lived high in those mountains for three years. During that time, they ate the rabbits and other game which Mehmet managed to kill

At the end of three years, they left the mountains and traveled to Mahmut's country. There a great wedding celebration was held for the wedding of Mahmut and his two brides, Zeynep and his doctor. It lasted for forty days and forty nights, and after that they had all of their wishes fulfilled. May we all be as fortunate as they were.